



Impacts of Third Sector Organisations' Activities

Third sector impact can be seen from two perspectives: “macro”, i.e. impacts the third sector has on beneficiaries and society at large; and “micro”, i.e. impacts that the third sector has on its own personnel, including both paid staff and volunteers. All impacts can be positive or negative. They can be controversial and often difficult to single out from wider contexts. TSI research will contribute to generate clarity and indications on how the impact of third sector activities can be measured.

Five types of impact emerge as particularly important from the literature on third sector research. However, we want to hear from people who experience third sector organisations, such as volunteers, employees, participants or users, what they consider to be particularly important impacts.

Third sector organisations may contribute to...

Well-being and quality of life

- Provide collective and individual services in the field of security, health, education, culture and recreation;
- Build civic engagement and social capital;
- Promote feelings of security, sense of well-being, confidence, and a sense of belonging.

Social innovation

- Identify unattended social problems and devise innovative solutions to them;
- Develop new services;
- Pioneer innovations that government and the market subsequently copy or support;
- Trigger social change;
- Contribute to labour market integration;
- Provide spaces of freedom and unforced activities, where new forms of social organisation or networked approaches to addressing public problems can be generated.

Civic engagement, empowerment, advocacy, community building

- Play a central political role;
- Channel, articulate and advocate for individuals' and groups' interests and values;
- Provide arenas of civic and political participation;
- Act as schools for democracy;
- Contribute to social capital.



Economic impacts

- Engage large workforce;
- Mobilise huge amounts of volunteer work;
- Provide work opportunities for persons with disabilities or from disadvantaged backgrounds;
- Contribute to urban regeneration and to local development in general;
- Foster trust in communities, that helps stimulate broader economic development.

Human resource impacts

- Benefit volunteers in terms of increased satisfaction, personal achievement, social networks and relations, skills, personal development, enhanced employability, improved mental and physical health and well-being;
- Promote active citizenship;
- Mitigate risks of antisocial behaviour;
- Provide high quality organisational environment, in terms of staff motivation and job satisfaction.

These findings on types of third sector impact from current research represent the starting point of TSI's work towards consensus within the research community and among third sector stakeholders. Together we aim to identify the most promising approaches to third sector impact assessment, and to recommend them to European statistical bodies. On all these issues, TSI fosters and welcomes contributions from third sector practitioners and networks. They will inform our priorities for further investigation.

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